

## ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 4819

House Committee on Senior Health, Security & Retirement  
October 9, 2007

The Alzheimer's Association is pleased to offer its support of passage of House Bill 4819. We are very pleased with the legislature's interest in protecting vulnerable adults and seniors who wander. Although HB 4819 is aimed at assisting a broader group of adults than just those with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia, the Association believes it is important that such legislation recognizes the specific issues faced by persons with dementia and their caregivers.

Six in ten people with Alzheimer's disease will wander. They might become disoriented and lost, even in their own neighborhood. Although common, the wandering behavior can be dangerous. If not found within 24 hours, half of those who wander risk serious injury or death. Wandering is among the biggest challenges caregivers face.

There are five criteria that are important to the Association with regard to any type of "Senior Alert" legislation, as follows:

- 1) Ensure that there is no mention of the word "Amber Alert" or use of the Amber Alert system;
- 2) Ensure that there is a mechanism allowing those responsible for sending out the alert to limit the scope of the alert geographically (i.e. if someone is on foot, it is counterproductive to send an alert statewide. Instead, use something like the lottery system or highway signs);
- 3) Ensure that first responders and law enforcement personnel receive dementia training, so that they know when it is appropriate to send an alert or not;
- 4) Ensure that alerts are not an automatic response but, rather, are only activated when certain criteria are met (e.g. the wanderer is in a vehicle);
- 5) Ensure that the family/caregivers of the person with dementia do not have to come up with documentation of a diagnosis of dementia before anyone will look for the wanderer.

HB 4819 addresses most of the above satisfactorily. However, Item 3, the critical need for dementia awareness training for law enforcement personnel, is something we would strongly advocate to have included in HB 4819. If law enforcement officers are going to be required to make determinations about such missing person reports and alerts, then they ought to be trained in identifying dementia and locating persons with dementia.

The Alzheimer's Association implements a nationwide identification and support program known as **Safe Return** which operates at the community level to assist in the safe return of individuals who wander. This program includes information and training modules for law enforcement officials, emergency personnel, and other community professionals who have a high potential for finding lost individuals. The program has

facilitated more than 11,000 safe returns since its inception over 10 years ago. (A fact sheet on Safe Return is attached.) The Alzheimer's Association would strongly encourage the legislature to include mandatory training for law enforcement in HB 4819 and would be happy to partner with law enforcement on this training curriculum.

Additionally, we are concerned for adults with early onset Alzheimer's, or related dementia, as these people are equally vulnerable, but would not meet the 65 and older requirement noted in HB 4819. We encourage the legislature to address this problem by dropping the age requirement.

If we can provide additional information, statistics or personal stories in support of this bill, we will be happy to do so. Please feel free to contact the Alzheimer's Association's state public policy coordinator, Sara Duris, for further input.  
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